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Confronting North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions: US Policy Options and Regional Implications

Kongdan Oh Hassig

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PREFACE

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CONFRONTING NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS: US POLICY OPTIONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Because eliminating nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from North Korea will require a multilateral effort, the policies and interests of North Korea's neighbors must be taken into account. This paper examines how these neighboring states might react to the four generic options that the United States can exercise: continued hostile containment, dialogue and negotiation, economic sanctions, and military pressure.

THE LOGIC OF NORTH KOREA'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

North Korea is economically weak and militarily strong. Its economic weakness is the result of the failure of a socialist command economy and the financial drain of supporting a large military. The Kim Jong-il regime needs a strong military to deter potential aggressors (of which there have been many in Korea's long history) and control the civilian population. The weaker the economy, the more vulnerable the regime is to foreign aggression and to a dissatisfied citizenry, and therefore the more important is the regime's avowed "military first" policy. Massive foreign aid (tens of billions of dollars) would alleviate the worst economic hardships, but would not correct the underlying weaknesses of the economy. In any case, the deep suspicions that Kim and the military have about the hostile intentions of foreigners would likely prevent the regime from dramatically reducing its military power, even if the economic situation improved.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR PATH

Ever since the North Koreans completed a five megawatt (MW) nuclear research reactor in 1986 and began constructing a large plutonium reprocessing plant next door, it has been apparent that they have the ambition to develop nuclear weapons, despite their repeated denials. To stop this program, the United States negotiated the 1994 Agreed Framework that froze the North's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, but permitted the North Koreans to avoid intrusive IAEA inspections for the time being. Construction in North Korea of the two 1000 MW light water nuclear reactors called for in the agreement lagged several years behind schedule, and in the late 1990s, the North Koreans began to build secret facilities to produce enriched weapons-grade uranium, in clear violation of

the 1994 agreement. When the United States refused to enter into negotiations with the North Koreans to adopt a new agreement, they withdrew from the NPT, restarted their five MW reactor, and began to reactivate their reprocessing plant in early 2003.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR CARD

As long as North Korea's Kim Jong-il regime does not irrevocably abandon its nuclear option, that option can be used to negotiate for inducements in a succession of agreements. North Korea's nuclear and missile programs also may provide a profitable commodity to sell in the international marketplace. The consensus among those who have studied the North Koreans closely is that they would never completely give up their nuclear weapons program.

US POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA

Washington's Cold War policy toward North Korea was one of containment. This policy was replaced by the Clinton administration's policy of negotiation and limited engagement; the George W. Bush administration returned to the Cold War containment policy as long as North Korea remained in violation of its nuclear agreements. If North Korea believes it is being ignored by the United States, Kim Jong-il has to increase the level of his threats to bring the United States to the bargaining table. Sooner or later, the North will present a threat too great to be ignored.

REGIONAL REACTIONS TO NORTH KOREA'S WMD AND US NORTH KOREA POLICY

Overview

North Korea's neighbors agree on two points: first, it is not acceptable for North Korea to have nuclear weapons; second, the United States should negotiate an agreement with North Korea on ways to reduce mutual threats. Left unspecified is what the terms of a US-DPRK agreement should be, although presumably these neighboring states expect that the United States would offer assurances not to threaten the Kim regime, and in addition compensate North Korea for not making or selling WMD.

China

China's concern over North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles is low, but growing. China's preferred solution is compromise between the United States and the DPRK. The Chinese believe that the United States is in part responsible for North Korea's resumption of its nuclear program because of the open hostility that the United States has shown toward North Korea. If the United States were to impose economic

sanctions on North Korea, China would officially oppose the move, at least under present circumstances. As for a preemptive strike on North Korean nuclear installations by US forces, it is hard to imagine any situation under which the Chinese would approve.

Russia

Although Russia desires to play a role in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis, it is not because the Russians feel threatened by a North Korean nuclear attack. Like China, Russia has urged the United States to engage in dialogue with North Korea to reach a compromise solution. It is too early to tell if a US-led sanction regime against North Korea would find much support in Russia, which in any case has little trade with North Korea, and Russia has given no indication that it would support a US preemptive attack on North Korea, although neither would it be likely to offer an embattled North Korea any military assistance.

Japan

In Japan, the level of public concern over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs continues to grow, although public opinion, which is more conservative than elite opinion, has hardly begun to consider the option of increasing Japan's military strength. The Japanese government's position, shared by most Japanese, is that the country would not abandon its "three nuclear principles" of not manufacturing, possessing, or deploying nuclear weapons, even if North Korea declared itself to be a nuclear power. If the United States imposes economic sanctions on North Korea, the Japanese may join in. Given the strong pacifist mood of the Japanese people, and the vulnerability of Japan to North Korean attack, it is unlikely that Japan would support a US preemptive attack on North Korea or agree beforehand to allow US bases in Japan to be used in such an attack.

South Korea

South Koreans show relatively little fear of North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles, because many Koreans believe that their northern brethren would not unleash weapons of mass destruction against fellow Koreans. The official policy of the present ROK administration is not to tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea but by all means resolve the situation peacefully. Supported by the government, inter-Korean dialogue, aid, and commercial transactions have increased. Many younger South Koreans, as well as some figures in the Roh government, favor engaging North Korea and moving away from the United States. Any international economic blockade of North Korea would be unpopular in South Korea, although the ROK government might cooperate to the extent

of reducing its aid donations to the North. If a US preemptive attack were launched against North Korea, it would seriously jeopardize, if not end, the US-ROK security alliance.

US OPTIONS REVISITED

The nuclear situation on the Korean peninsula continues to evolve. Throughout the region, greater perceived risk and potential damage from North Korea are associated with greater perceived threat. The exception is the South Korean case, where risk and potential damage are high, but perceived threat is low. Threat perceptions translate in predictable ways into attitudes toward Washington's North Korea policy alternatives. Those countries that feel least threatened favor US compromise with North Korea or a continuation of the status quo. The advocates of negotiation are essentially saying that they are willing to live with the possibility of a residual North Korean nuclear weapons capability, even though the government of every one of these countries has insisted that North Korean nuclear weapons can never be tolerated.

The United States lacks attractive policy options. Containment or compromise means living with the suspicion that North Korea has nuclear weapons. Economic sanctions are unlikely to force the Kim Jong-il government to surrender its nuclear weapons and stop its nuclear programs. An attack on North Korea would not receive any support from North Korea's neighbors, and might seriously damage US relations with all the regional states.

CONFRONTING NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS: US POLICY OPTIONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Eliminating nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from North Korea will require a multilateral effort. North Korean artillery and missiles hold South Korea—and to a lesser extent Japan—hostage. North Korean refugee flows threaten China and Russia. Any decision made by the United States to confront the North Koreans is made in the context of a triangular security game involving the United States, North Korea, and North Korea's neighbors. Given the multilateral nature of this situation, American policy formulation needs to take into account the policies and interests of North Korea's neighbors. The purpose of this paper is to gain a preliminary understanding of how these neighboring states would react to the four generic options that the United States can exercise: continued hostile containment, dialogue and negotiation, economic sanctions, and military pressure.

THE LOGIC OF NORTH KOREA'S WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

North Korea is economically weak and militarily strong. Its economic weakness is caused by the failure of a socialist command economy and by the financial drain of supporting a large military. The Kim Jong-il regime needs a strong military to deter potential aggressors (of which there have been many in Korea's long history) and control the civilian population. The weaker the economy, the more vulnerable the regime is to foreign aggression and to a dissatisfied citizenry, and therefore the more important is the regime's avowed "military first" policy.

The socialist economy, in turn, cannot be abandoned or substantially modified for at least three reasons. First, socialism is an inherent part of the regime's ideology, and the principal rationale for the existence of North Korea as a state separate from South Korea. Second, North Korea must remain socialist because the regime needs the power of central command over the economy to control the population. Third, the regime does not know how to run a capitalist economy.

In the absence of a viable civilian export economy, military exports—especially WMD—can serve at least two economic purposes: direct sales to other countries or sub-national groups, and "blackmailing" foreign governments into providing economic aid.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR PATH

Ever since the North Koreans completed a five megawatt (MW) nuclear research reactor in 1986 and began constructing a large plutonium reprocessing plant next door, it has been apparent that they have the ambition to develop nuclear weapons, despite their repeated denials. The five MW plant is too small to be a power plant; its only purpose is to burn fuel that can be reprocessed into weapons-grade plutonium. The North Koreans unloaded spent fuel from this reactor without IAEA supervision in early 1994 and stored the fuel in sealed canisters at the Yongbyon nuclear site. From October 1994, the plant was sealed and put under surveillance by the IAEA, pursuant to provisions of the October 1994 Agreed Framework. The IAEA inspectors were expelled in early 2003, and presumably the spent fuel canisters have been unsealed and moved to the reprocessing plant. Some fuel from the five MW plant may also have been unloaded in 1989. In 1984, the North Koreans also began constructing a 50 MW reactor, and in 1991 a 200 MW reactor, both of which, when completed, can be used to generate electricity, and in the process, produce relatively large amounts of spent fuel capable of being reprocessed into more weapons-grade plutonium.

When the CIA first reported the construction of the reprocessing plant in the late 1980s, the Koreans denied the allegations, claiming the plant was a textile factory. When presented with incontrovertible evidence that the facility was nuclear, the North Koreans called it a “radio-chemical laboratory.” The plant was only partially completed before being shut down in 1994 by the Agreed Framework, but the North Koreans admitted that it had been used to reprocess a small amount of plutonium.¹ The CIA believes that 10 to 13 kilograms of plutonium had already been processed, enough to make two or three small nuclear weapons.

Back in 1974, North Korea joined the IAEA. In the 1980s, as a condition for Soviet aid in building four 440 MW light-water reactors, North Korea acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but through various stratagems was able to postpone signing the NPT's safeguards agreement, which provided for nuclear inspections, until pressured by the United States in 1992. By then, the Russians had pulled out of the nuclear project. Throughout 1992 and 1993, the North Koreans refused to permit the IAEA to investigate irregularities in their initial nuclear safeguards report. Under further pressure from the United States, the North Koreans announced their

¹ The North Koreans said they had reprocessed 0.10 kg of plutonium from damaged fuel rods. See for example Joseph S. Bermudez, Jr., *Military-Technical Observations of the DPRK's Nuclear Program*, a report for Los Alamos National Laboratory, August 29, 1994.

withdrawal from the NPT in March 1993, and continued work on the reprocessing plant. Faced with the unattractive prospect of either bombing the North's nuclear facilities before they became operational, or watching North Korea "turn out plutonium like sausages," to quote the memorable phrase of then Defense Under Secretary Walter Slocombe, the United States negotiated the Agreed Framework, signed in October 1994. The agreement froze the North's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, but permitted the North Koreans to avoid intrusive IAEA inspections for the time being. In any case, the North Koreans insisted that they were hiding nothing, and that there was consequently no need for further inspections. At the beginning of the talks leading up to the signing of the agreement, the North Koreans agreed to "temporarily suspend" their withdrawal from the NPT, with the understanding that oversight of their nuclear program would henceforth be carried out according to the US-DPRK agreement, and not as a requirement of the NPT safeguards agreement, in regard to which they now claimed special status.

For a variety of reasons, the construction of the two 1000 MW light water nuclear reactors promised in return for the North's nuclear freeze at Yongbyon lagged several years behind schedule. The Clinton administration had expected that the North Korean regime would collapse before the reactors were built, but as Kim Jong-il succeeded in consolidating his hold over the country after the death of his father, Kim Il-sung, US enthusiasm for building the reactors waned. It might be argued that the North Koreans themselves had good reasons not to see the project completed: their decrepit power grid would be unable to handle the electricity generated by the new reactors, the completion of the project would end the annual half-million tons of heavy oil being delivered by the United States, and the North would finally have to accept IAEA nuclear inspections.

In the late 1990s, the North Koreans began to build facilities to produce enriched weapons-grade uranium, in clear violation of the 1994 agreement.² Confronted with the evidence by Assistant Secretary of State James A. Kelly in October 2002, they admitted to operating the program, although they later denied admitting it. The United States then suspended the light-water reactor project and halted the project's delivery of heavy oil to North Korea. The North Koreans promised that if the United States fulfilled its responsibilities according to the 1994 agreement, and signed a new agreement centered around a guarantee by the United States not to threaten or interfere with the Kim regime,

² Although the 1994 Agreed Framework does not specifically rule out nuclear activities in facilities outside the Yongbyon area, the agreement specifies that North Korea will also honor the 1992 ROK-DPRK "Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," which prohibits the possession, production, or use of nuclear weapons anywhere on the Korean peninsula.

all US concerns about North Korea's nuclear program would be dispelled—virtually the same words they had used to get the Agreed Framework ten years earlier.

When the US refused to enter into negotiations with the North Koreans until they had closed down their uranium program, they (the North Koreans) withdrew from the NPT, restarted their five MW reactor, and began to reactivate their reprocessing plant. It is believed that North Korea could produce a half-dozen plutonium weapons from the reprocessed plutonium by the end of 2003, but that enriched uranium production will take anywhere from several months to several years to begin. If the 50 MW and 200 MW plants were completed, along with the reprocessing plant, the North Koreans should be in a position to produce material for 50 nuclear weapons every year, and the uranium enrichment program would add another 30 weapons' worth of fissile material.³

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR CARD

It is important to ask whether, in return for inducements, the Kim regime is now or ever was willing to relinquish its capacity to produce nuclear weapons material. A powerful argument in favor of the North's relinquishing nuclear capabilities is that nuclear weapons are a threat to the United States (and other countries), thereby providing the United States with a reason to attack North Korea—the very consequence the Kim regime seeks to avoid by producing the weapons.

On the other hand, even without nuclear weapons the Kim regime is reprehensible. Its past crimes—including the Korean War invasion of South Korea, post-war military provocations on the Korean peninsula, international drug smuggling and counterfeiting, and the cruel treatment of its own people—could all count as reasons to overthrow even a nuclear-free regime. To protect itself, the Kim regime may decide it is wise to have a nuclear deterrent.

A nuclear arsenal would provide North Korea with more than a deterrent. As a nuclear power, North Korea would join an exclusive group of states, taking what most North Koreans believe is their rightful place in the international order. Also, as long as the regime does not irrevocably abandon its nuclear option, that option can be used to negotiate for inducements in a succession of agreements. Moreover, North Korea's

³ See for example papers by Jon B. Wolfsthal ("Getting Back to Go: Re-establishing a Freeze on North Korea's Plutonium Cycle") and Henry Sokolski ("Contending with a Nuclear North Korea"), disseminated by Nautilus Institute's email special reports on January 31, 2003 and December 23, 2002, respectively. The papers may be found on the Nautilus web site at http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0236A_Wolfsthal.html and http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0228A_Sokolski.html.

nuclear program, like its missile program, may also prove to be a profitable commodity in the shadowy international marketplace of WMD. Today, the consensus among those who have studied the North Koreans closely is that they would never completely give up their nuclear weapons program.

US POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA

High-level Washington-Pyongyang nuclear negotiations began in June 1993 and culminated in the signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994, although the negotiations were held in an atmosphere of mutual distrust and bad will. The achievement of full normalization of political and economic relations called for in the agreement was highly improbable. Even after signing the agreement, distrust continued on both sides, fueling North Korea's need for a strong deterrent. The only alternative to a negotiated nuclear settlement was conflict, which neither side wanted.

After August 1998, when the North launched its first ICBM, the Clinton administration undertook a review of its North Korea policy under the direction of former Secretary of Defense William Perry. The product of the review, informally known as the Perry proposal, was an extended version of the Agreed Framework: "more for more," as the term came to be used in the succeeding Bush administration. The Perry proposal failed to gain any traction in Washington, and apparently was never formally presented to the North Koreans. President Clinton almost went to Pyongyang to seal a missile nonproliferation deal said to be in the final stages of formulation, but decided against it with only a couple of months to go in his tenure. The proposed trip—following on the heels of a visit to Pyongyang by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in October 2000—raised North Korean expectations of a thaw in US-DPRK relations.

On March 6, 2001, just before ROK President Kim Dae-jung arrived in Washington to lobby the new Bush administration for engagement with North Korea, Secretary of State Colin Powell said "we do plan to engage with North Korea to pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off. . . . And so we are not avoiding North Korea. Quite the contrary" ⁴ After the two presidents met, Powell told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "As we look at the elements of the negotiation that the previous administration had left behind, there are some things there that are very promising. What was not there was a monitoring and verification regime of the kind that we would have to have in order to move forward in negotiations with such a regime. And

⁴ Press Availability with Her Excellency Anna Lindh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Washington, DC, March 6, 2001. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/1116pf.htm>

so what the President was saying yesterday is that we are going to take our time, we're going to put together a comprehensive policy, and in due course, at a time and at a pace of our choosing, we will decide and determine how best to engage with the North Korean regime.”⁵

On June 6, 2001, the President announced that his administration had completed its North Korea policy review and that he had directed his national security team to “undertake serious discussions with North Korea on a broad agenda to include: improved implementation of the Agreed Framework relating to North Korea’s nuclear activities; verifiable constraints on North Korea’s missile programs and a ban on its missile exports; and a less threatening conventional military posture.”⁶ The North Koreans were unhappy with the broadened agenda. Until Assistant Secretary Kelly’s visit to Pyongyang in October 2002, the only US-DPRK diplomatic contacts were working-level meetings in New York between Ambassador Jack Prichard and the DPRK delegation to the United Nations, and a brief encounter between Secretary Powell and North Korea’s foreign minister at the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Brunei in July 2002.

In 2001 and 2002, the US-DPRK conflict dynamic intensified. North Korea could not survive with the status quo; it needed continuous infusions of foreign aid even to feed its people. The United States, through its influence on South Korea and Japan as well as on international institutions, held the key to massive foreign aid. North Korea desperately needed to make a deal that would exchange some (more likely) or all (less likely) of its WMD capability for sustained aid. As long as North Korea believed it was being ignored by the United States, Kim Jong-il had to increase the level of his threats to bring the United States to the bargaining table. In this spiral of North Korean threats and US disregard, sooner or later the North would present a threat too great to be ignored, reaching the so-called “red line.”

By early 2003, Pyongyang had quit the NPT. The North Koreans were believed to have at least two nuclear weapons and enough un-reprocessed plutonium to make half a dozen more, with more fissile material to come from the new uranium enrichment program. To make matters worse, the North’s missile program had advanced to the point where it would be able to target the continental United States within several years. North

⁵ Testimony at Budget Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, March 8, 2001. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/1164pf.htm>

⁶ Statement by the President, June 6, 2001 (press release dated June 13, 2001). <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010611-4.html>

Korea was quickly gaining the stature of a global military power, even though its economy was utterly broken.

REGIONAL REACTIONS TO NORTH KOREA'S WMD AND US NORTH KOREA POLICY

Overview

North Korea's neighbors agree on two points: first, it is not acceptable for North Korea to have nuclear weapons; second, the United States should negotiate an agreement with North Korea on ways to reduce mutual threats. Left unspecified is what the terms of a US-DPRK agreement should be, although presumably these neighboring states expect that the United States would offer assurances not to threaten the Kim regime, and in addition compensate North Korea for not making or selling nuclear weapons.

In the following sections, the evolving positions of China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia will be examined in terms of the degree to which each is concerned about a North Korean nuclear program. In addition, each state's position on potential US policies toward North Korea will be examined: (1) a US policy of containment (the current policy); (2) negotiations and compromise; (3) economic sanctions against North Korea; or (4) preemptive attack on North Korean nuclear installations.

This research was conducted in the spring and summer of 2003—before and after the US-China-DPRK talks but before the August 2003 six-party talks. At the three-party talks, North Korea offered a “bold” proposal, the terms of which have not been made public. The United States reiterated its demand that North Korea end all its nuclear programs before serious discussion could begin on an agreement to replace the suspended 1994 Agreed Framework. In an aside, the chief North Korean negotiator reportedly told his American counterpart that North Korea already possessed nuclear weapons.

China

China's concern over North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles is low—at least compared to the concern shown by South Korea, Japan, and the United States. But Chinese concern is unquestionably growing. It is difficult to imagine any circumstances under which the DPRK would use such weapons against China, although at least one Chinese commentator has suggested that “it is not impossible that China may be confronted with nuclear blackmail [from North Korea] over some issue one day.”⁷

⁷ “News Analysis” posted on the *Renmin Wang* website at <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn>, January 23, 2003. This web site carries the copyright claim of *Renmin Ribao*, the Chinese Communist Party's *People's Daily* newspaper. The article is essentially the same as an article entitled “DPRK Nuclear Crisis

China's greater concern is that a North Korean nuclear weapons capability might provoke Japan, South Korea, or even Taiwan to acquire the same.⁸

Perhaps of greatest concern to China is that North Korean nuclear weapons might invite a preemptive American attack on North Korea, triggering a war that would bring more American troops into northeast Asia and send fleeing North Korean troops and refugees into northern China. The outcome of total war would be either a no-man's land of destruction in North Korea or a united Korea under the government of the ROK, still allied with the United States. For China, one advantage of tolerating a trouble-making North Korea is that China's purported influence over the Pyongyang government can provide diplomatic leverage for dealing with South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Thus, a settlement of the nuclear issue is desirable for China, but not urgent.

China's preferred solution is compromise between the United States and the DPRK. The Chinese believe that the United States is in part responsible for North Korea's resumption of its nuclear program because of the open hostility that the United States has shown toward North Korea—especially during the George W. Bush administration—and the lack of enthusiasm that Washington has shown for the Agreed Framework.⁹ It would suit the Chinese if the United States took primary responsibility for ending the North's nuclear program by using American, South Korean, or Japanese resources to placate the North Koreans, as was the case with the Agreed Framework. The Chinese are the largest foreign aid donors to North Korea and they would probably be happy to see the United States take over more of that burden. On the other hand, the Chinese do not want to see the United States work too closely with North Korea, thereby reducing China's influence on North Korea and in the region. According to a PRC internal document obtained by a Japanese press agency, China wants to prevent North Korea from “suddenly making a major policy shift, complying with all demands of the United States, and reaching an agreement with the United States that would be extremely disadvantageous to China.”¹⁰ In this respect, China is in something of a catch-22 situation.

and China's Supreme Strategic Interests” published by Professor Shi Yinhong in Hong Kong's *Zhongguo Pinglun* on February 3, 2003 (pp. 14-18).

⁸ See for example a widely noted interview with Chinese scholars Zhyang Liangui and Shi Yinhong in *Zhongguo Jingying Bao*, internet version, on May 12, 2003. <http://www.cb.com.cn>

⁹ For example, Zheng Yongnian, “The Unwillingness of China Regarding the North Korean Problem,” *Hong Kong Hsin Pao* (the non-government *Hong Kong Economic Journal*), March 11, 2003, p. 25.

¹⁰ According to a PRC internal document obtained by Japan's Jiji press. Jiji Web, May 13, 2003.

China's reactions to North Korea and its nuclear program can be tapped at three levels of Chinese politics. On the official level, the Chinese government deplores equally North Korea's attempt to develop nuclear weapons and US pressure on North Korea.¹¹ As a partial solution to the US-DPRK standoff, China suggests that North Korea be given assurances (presumably by the United States) that no attempt will be made to destabilize or replace its government.¹² Off the record, working-level Chinese officials have for years expressed their impatience and displeasure with the North Koreans, who refuse to take advantage of the reconciliation overtures of the South Koreans to reform their economy along the lines of the Chinese model.¹³ The Communist camaraderie that existed between the late Kim Il-sung and the first-generation Chinese communist leaders is gone. The Chinese have never approved of the dynastic succession of Kim Jong-il, nor have they developed a good working relationship with him. In 1997, Chinese Premier Li Peng reportedly told a group of visiting American congressmen that "North Korea is neither an ally of the PRC nor an enemy, but merely a neighboring country."¹⁴

The Kim Jong-il regime is even more openly criticized by Chinese outside the government. The standard that Chinese commentators (both inside and outside the government) most frequently use to evaluate China's relations with North Korea is the degree to which those relations further China's most basic interests.¹⁵ What these topmost interests might be is another matter. According to one article printed in the Chinese government-affiliated press, among the paramount interests are achieving good relations with the United States and with China's more successful neighbors such as Japan and South Korea.¹⁶ A Chinese commentator in Hong Kong warns that China does not want

¹¹ For example, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry says, "The Chinese side maintains that denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is conducive to peace and stability of the region and the world. In the meantime, it also holds that the DPRK's concern over its security should also be solved." Li Zhongfa, "Foreign Ministry Spokesman Says That the Chinese Side Does Not Agree to the Use of Pressure or Sanctions to Solve the DPRK Nuclear Issue," Xinhua Asia-Pacific Service (China's official New China News Agency), June 3, 2003.

¹² Li Zhongfa.

¹³ In the article by Prof. Shi Yinhong cited above, the author complains that "the DPRK has never really tried hard to almost radically improve its own security plight" through reconciliation with South Korea.

¹⁴ Reported by Pak Tu-sik in South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper, April 17, 1997, p 2. A similar point is made in a recent article by Qin Yu in Hong Kong's independent *Kuang Chiao Ching* (*Wide Angle*), who notes that from the time in the 1970s when North Korea declared itself to be a member of the non-aligned nations, it was no longer an ally of Communist China. April 15, 2003, No. 367, pp. 58-60.

¹⁵ For example, "When dealing with the DPRK nuclear crisis, the most important thing for us is to assign priority to China's main security and development interests." Zhang Liangui and Shi Yinhong, op cit. Or, "That North Korea is an important ally is beyond discussion, but it should be clearly understood that China's national interests get top priority." Quoted from a leaked PRC government document said to be presented to the CCP's Party Central Committee by China's vice minister of foreign affairs in charge of the Asia Pacific, published by Japan's *Foresight*, April 18, 2003, p. 29.

¹⁶ "News Analysis"

North Korea “to become for China what Cuba is for the United States,” adding that, even without nuclear weapons, North Korea is an “alien outcast” in Asia.¹⁷ China wants to become an accepted and “normal” country, not a pariah like its communist neighbor.¹⁸

Little as they like the North Koreans or their nuclear ambitions, neither do the Chinese approve of the Bush administration’s overt hostility toward North Korea. If the United States were to impose economic sanctions on North Korea, either bilaterally or through the UN Security Council, China would officially oppose the move, at least under present circumstances.¹⁹ But articles in the Chinese press hint that sanctions might be supported somewhere down the road, either if North Korea moves ahead with its nuclear weapons program or if the United States seems to be moving closer to taking military action against North Korea. One Chinese academic recommends that “the greatest efforts should be made in applying diplomatic means; if these are not successful, we can consider other means of peacefully resolving the issue as a substitute or essential supplement.”²⁰ On the web page of the Chinese party daily, *Renmin Ribao (Daily Worker)*, an article says that “we should consider the role of economic means as a substitute or a necessary supplement, from the perspective of policy choice and planning.”²¹

As for a preemptive strike on North Korean nuclear installations by US forces, it is hard to imagine any situation under which the Chinese would approve, although they might not take any military action on behalf of North Korea as long as the American attack were limited.²² What the Chinese role might be in a full-scale US-DPRK conflict is beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁷ Zheng Yongnian

¹⁸ Zheng Yongnian

¹⁹ On June 3, 2003, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson cited above says, “It [China] does not agree to the use of pressure or sanctions in international relations . . .” Li Zhongfa, Xinhua Asia Pacific Service, June 3, 2003.

²⁰ In *Zhongguo Jingying Bao*, *ibid.* In his *Zhongguo Pinglun* article, cited above, Prof. Shi says “we have to take part in certain US-led actions in a principled and sensible way.”

²¹ “News Analysis.”

²² Different opinions exist on whether China would intervene in a US-DPRK conflict. Qin Yu, cited earlier, predicts Chinese intervention in the face of a US invasion of North Korea, but not in the case of a surgical strike. In a May 3, 2003 article by Ching Cheong in the Singapore *Straits Times* entitled “China Offers North Korea Security from Any US Attack,” Chinese sources are quoted as telling the North Koreans that China would assist them in their defense against an American attack under specific conditions: (1) that North Korea end its nuclear weapons programs; (2) that it not threaten South Korea or Japan; and (3) that it engage in serious dialogue with the United States. Otherwise, the Chinese sources suggest, China is not likely to become directly involved in a conflict on the Korean peninsula.

Russia

Although Russia desires to play a role in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis, it is not because the Russians feel threatened by a North Korean nuclear attack.²³ However, like China, Russia is concerned that a preemptive US attack on North Korea would have multiple negative consequences for Russia, including nuclear fallout, refugee flows, and in the longer term, less chance for Russia to increase its influence in northeast Asia.²⁴

After a decade-long absence from playing an important role in international politics, Russia is once again becoming actively involved in foreign diplomacy. Russia has a vital interest in achieving peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, because even though Russia shares only an eleven-mile border with North Korea, the Asian part of Russia is rich in natural resources that could be developed with the economic assistance of Korea and Japan. For example, the natural gas fields of Amur and Sakhalin could provide energy supplies for Japan and Korea—if the gas could be piped through North Korea. Russia would also like to see its trans-Siberian railway connected through North Korea to markets in South Korea and Japan.

In northeast Asia, Russia is trying to expand its influence to counter the influence of the United States and China by wooing North Korea, once a Cold War ally but now almost a stranger. To repair relations, President Putin became the first Russian or Soviet leader in office to visit North Korea, in July 2000. Kim Jong-il traveled to Moscow and western Russia by train in 2001, and to Vladivostok and eastern Russia in 2002. Putin and Kim seemed to get along well, but Kim was harshly criticized in the newly liberalized Russian press.²⁵

Russia's Cold War habits of bureaucratic stonewalling die hard. On the one hand, some top officials (e.g., Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Rumyantsev) profess ignorance of the North's nuclear program, as in "Russia has no special sources of information in that sphere. . . Russia has had no nuclear contacts with North Korea since

²³ Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losyukov, Russia's point person on the North Korean nuclear issue, is quoted by ITAR-TASS in 2001 as saying that "North Korea's missile program is not a problem for Russia, which does not have concerns on this issue." March 3, 2001.

²⁴ The fear of nuclear fallout has been expressed in a number of Russian news reports. For example, Oleg Zhunosov and Yelena Shesternina, "If Tomorrow There Is a War That in Two to Three Hours' Time Involves Vladivostok," *Izvestiya* web page, August 1, 2003.

²⁵ A web site controlled by Boris Berezofskiy's news organization was especially outspoken in an article entitled "Pyongyang Joker Humiliates Russia" (referring to a bogus missile nonproliferation offer that Kim had made to the Russians the previous year). Kim was most strongly criticized for tying up the Russian train service with his private train, and for refusing access to Russian news reporters or Koreans living in Russia. <http://www.Grani.ru>, August 6, 2001. See also *Kommersant*, August 2, 2001, p. 3.

1993.”²⁶ It does seem strange that no job-hungry Russian scientists chose to remain in North Korea. But even if they have all departed, and the Russian spy network has been oblivious to North Korea’s nuclear activities, it seems strange that they would have forgotten that the head of the KGB in 1990 reached the conclusion that North Korea already had nuclear weapons.²⁷ On the other hand, despite his self-professed lack of information, Minister Rummyantsev has estimated that North Korea is as much as fifty years away from developing its first nuclear device.²⁸

Like China, Russia has urged the United States to engage in dialogue with North Korea to reach a compromise solution.²⁹ On the issue of whether North Korea should be given security guarantees by the United States or the international community, in June 2003, President Putin said “If North Korea has problems and concerns over its security, bearing in mind that no one actually intends to attack North Korea, it should be given these security guarantees.”³⁰ But Russia is presumably not willing to enter into any multilateral security guarantees, to judge by an April 2003 statement of deputy foreign minister Alexander Losyukov who said, “Russia does not see any need to provide North Korea with separate security guarantees. . . Why should we guarantee anyone’s security if a third party [presumably the United States] is against it? That would mean a conflict with a third party.”³¹ Deputy Minister Losyukov has traveled throughout Asia trying to encourage dialogue with North Korea, perhaps as part of a multilateral framework involving Russia, which was left out of the 1994 Agreed Framework and the 1997 Four Party Talks.

If the United States continues to refuse to negotiate a compromise with North Korea, Russia is likely to strengthen its diplomatic overtures toward North Korea, hoping that South Korea will lose patience with the Bush administration and seek to more actively engage North Korea by providing economic funding for Russian-built projects in North Korea. The cost of these projects would be deducted from Russia’s \$2.24 billion debt to South Korea, and would give Russia an economic presence in North Korea that would otherwise not be sustainable.³²

²⁶ Minister Rummyantsev to ITAR-TASS, May 14, 2003.

²⁷ Vladimir Voronov, “A Time Bomb,” *Moscow’s New Times*, April 18, 2003.

²⁸ Moscow’s Channel One TV, January 10, 2003.

²⁹ Vladimir Putin quoted on Moscow’s Russia TV RTR, June 20, 2003.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interfax, April 11, 2003.

³² Natalya Afanasyeva, “Across Whole of Eurasia in Two Weeks: Accord Reached on Linking up Transsiberian with Pan-Korean Railroad,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 21, 2001, p. 4.

It is too early to tell if a US-led sanction regime against North Korea would find much support in Russia, which in any case has little trade with North Korea. In April 2003, Losyukov said that “We will oppose such an approach as long as our North Korean colleagues remain sensible.” He added, however, that “If North Korea begins considering the production of nuclear weapons, or, moreover, the possibility of using them, it will mean a very serious choice for us.”³³ In May 2003, Russia’s ambassador to the ROK, Teymuraz O. Ramishvili, told the *Korea Herald* that “sanctions should be the last resort.”³⁴

Russia has given no indication that it would support a US preemptive attack on North Korea, although neither would it be likely to offer an embattled North Korea any military assistance. In 1995, Russia’s mutual security treaty with North Korea was allowed to lapse, to be replaced in 2000 by a Treaty of Friendship that lacked the old clauses on security cooperation and communist ideological affinity.

Japan

Japan’s concern over North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities is high. For some years, North Korea’s Nodong missiles have been able to target any point in Japan, but Japanese public concern about the North Korean missile threat was not galvanized until the North launched an intercontinental-range rocket that flew over Japan in August 1998. Pending the development of a highly effective anti-missile system, the Japanese have no defense against North Korean medium- and long-range missiles. Japan is vulnerable as well to North Korean sea-borne commando raids.

The Japanese also are concerned about a possible flow of North Korean refugees into Japan, although few have yet arrived. Some of the refugees might come by boat across the East Sea (Sea of Japan). Japan would also be a natural refuge for the 93,000 former Korean residents of Japan who emigrated to North Korea in the late 1950s and early 1960s, along with their descendants and their 1,800 Japanese wives.³⁵

The Japanese have a long list of complaints against the North Koreans, including the North’s nuclear and missile development, spy ship intrusions, missile firings toward Japan, and the North’s admitted abductions of Japanese citizens in commando raids in the 1970s.

³³ Interfax, April 11, 2003.

³⁴ So Hyon-chin, “Russia Opposes Sanctions on North Korea,” *The Korea Herald*, May 22, 2003.

³⁵ Masao Okonogi, “Public Support Vital in Handling North,” contribution by Professor Okonogi to internet version of *Asahi Shimbun*, March 17, 2003.

Japanese-North Korean relations have traditionally been bad, but the Pyongyang declaration, signed in September 2002 at the first-ever North Korea-Japan summit meeting, expresses the intention of the two states to work toward normalizing relations, which would bring North Korea about 10 billion dollars in loans and aid as colonial and wartime reparations. In the declaration, North Korea agreed to “abide by all relevant international agreements” in its nuclear affairs. However, that agreement, like most that North Korea has signed, has become virtually meaningless as North Korea has withdrawn from the NPT. In the event of a second Korean War, Japan could be targeted by North Korean military strikes at the 40,000 American troops who live in about 75 bases spread across the country, primarily on Okinawa.

In Japan, the level of public concern over North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs continues to grow, although public opinion, which is more conservative than elite opinion, has hardly begun to consider the option of increasing Japan’s military strength. In January 2003, just after North Korea declared its withdrawal from the NPT, the latest in a series of triennial polls conducted by the Japanese Cabinet found that 43 percent of Japanese thought Japan could be drawn into a war (up from 30 percent three years earlier), and another 37 percent considered war a possibility.³⁶ This is the largest proportion of concerned responses since the polling was begun in 1975. In northern Japan, over-flown by a North Korean rocket in 1998, concern was even higher. Overall, the North Korean threat was mentioned by 75 percent of respondents. Yet 62 percent considered that the defense budget was adequate, and only 15 percent favored a boost in defense spending.

The possibility of revising Japan’s “peace constitution” to permit a more active military stance has been broached for years, but the public has never gotten behind calls for a change. Since 1976, the Japanese Defense Agency’s (JDA) “concept of basic defense” has been “possessing the minimum defense capability necessary for an independent country.” In April 2003, the JDA decided to revise the 1995 policy along the lines of replacing “possessing the minimum defense capability” with “coping with new threats,” although a more detailed policy has yet to be worked out.³⁷ What *has* been accomplished, ever so slowly, is to pass legislation to make it easier to deploy JDA forces and handle national emergencies.³⁸ In 1992, a bill was passed to permit Japanese forces to play a limited role in international peacekeeping operations. A 1999 bill extended the

³⁶ Jiji press report, March 29, 2003. Also, *Asahi Shimbun*, internet version, March 31, 2003.

³⁷ Hirofumi Oniki, *Mainichi Shimbun*, internet version, April 20, 2003, Morning Edition.

³⁸ Masaru Honda, “Hodgepodge Emergency Legislation a Risk,” *Asahi Shimbun* internet version, May 16, 2003.

JDA's radius of defense in the Pacific. In 2001, an anti-terrorism bill was passed. And in June 2003, a bill was passed to make it easier for the defense forces to respond to an attack (without such legislation, the letter of the law required military vehicles to stop for red lights and toll booths on the way to the battlefield!).³⁹ More emergency bills are expected to be submitted and passed in 2004 to deal with a situation in which Japan is involved in a war.⁴⁰

Japan launched its first two spy satellites in March 2003, beginning a program to reduce dependence on US surveillance capabilities. Serious consideration is being given to participating more actively in a missile defense system with the United States. The current thinking is that Japan might deploy the new PAC-3 missile system around metropolitan areas to try to intercept North Korean Nodong missiles in their descent, and to mount a Ship-Based Missile Defense (SMD) system on several Aegis-class destroyers to intercept missiles in mid-course.⁴¹ Missile flight time from North Korea to Japan would be less than 10 minutes, affording little warning. The combined missile system would be expensive, of undetermined effectiveness, and possibly in violation of Japan's constitutional ban on collective defense.

Although the Japanese government's position is that the country would not abandon its "three nuclear principles" of not manufacturing, possessing, or deploying nuclear weapons, even if North Korea declared itself to be a nuclear power,⁴² the nuclear option does receive occasional mention by people outside the government.⁴³ The arguments against a nuclear arsenal are strong. First, it would violate the three non-nuclear principles that have become enshrined in Japanese politics (although not in the constitution). It also might violate the constitutional prohibition against Japan's engaging in collective defense. It would be a violation of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, and make Japan the target of anger and suspicion throughout Asia. But on more practical grounds, it has been argued that Japan is so vulnerable to North Korean nuclear attack

³⁹ Yoshihisa Komori, *The U.S.-ROK Alliance at Fifty; The Regional Context: A View from Japan*. Paper presented at a joint conference of the United States Institute of Peace and the National Defense University, May 16, 2003.

⁴⁰ *The Daily Yomiuri*, internet version, May 27, 2003.

⁴¹ See for example *Asahi Shimbun*, internet version, March 12, 2003, Morning Edition, and April 3, 2003, Morning Edition; Kyodo, April 22, 2003; Kyodo World Service, May 30, 2003.

⁴² Even the hawkish Japan Defense Agency director General Shigeru Ishiba has gone on record against considering the nuclear option. *Kyodo Clue II*, internet version, February 18, 2003.

⁴³ For example, the international political analyst Kan Ito writing in *Shokun*, April 1, 2003, pp. 86-94, argues that the US nuclear umbrella is becoming meaningless.

that retaliation, while inflicting some damage on North Korea, would do nothing to save the country.⁴⁴

The US-Japan security alliance is still counted as the main deterrent to foreign aggression. In 2003, the Koizumi administration offered to provide non-combat support for the second war on Iraq, even though approximately 80 percent of the Japanese people opposed the US-led war.⁴⁵ The rationale for Koizumi's decision was that Japan needed US protection against a growing North Korean threat, and this argument was accepted by the majority of the Japanese public. At about the same time, talk in Washington about redeploying US troops back from the DMZ in South Korea (interpreted by some as a reduction in the US commitment to protect South Korea) caused some Japanese to wonder whether the US commitment to the defense of Japan might undergo a similar review. Japan is also concerned that strains in US-ROK relations caused by divergent North Korea policies will undermine the US-Japan-ROK regional alliance structure that has helped deter North Korea in the past.⁴⁶

Given the heightened threat of North Korean missiles and nuclear weapons, the value of the US-Japan security alliance has increased for most Japanese, as illustrated by Japanese acquiescence to sending non-combat troops to support a highly unpopular war. In the words of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, who has been closely involved in dealing with North Korea, Japan is the "shield" and the United States is the "sword" when it comes to Japan's defense. But the Japanese are constantly puzzling over what is the shield and what is the sword; or to put it plainly, where Japan should draw the line on an "exclusively defense-oriented posture."⁴⁷ For example, Abe suggested that if North Korea should threaten to turn Tokyo into a "sea of fire" (a popular North Korean threat) and simultaneously began fueling their missiles (those that do not use solid fuel), the dual actions might be regarded as an attack in progress against which Japan could legitimately launch a counterattack. The possibility of building light aircraft carriers or developing cruise missiles has even been mentioned in this connection.⁴⁸

Japan is North Korea's second largest trading partner, after China, with total trade of \$370 million in 2002.⁴⁹ In some past years, Japan has also been one of the largest food aid donors to North Korea, although, despite North Korean requests, Japan has not

⁴⁴ *Asahi Shimbun*, internet version, February 20, 2003.

⁴⁵ Masao Okonogi, "Public Support Vital in Handling North."

⁴⁶ Yoshihisa Komori.

⁴⁷ Interview with Shinzo Abe by Koichi Endo, *Bungei Shunju*, June 1, 2003, pp. 168-175.

⁴⁸ Yoshitaka Sasaki, *Asahi Shimbun*, internet version, April 11, 2003.

⁴⁹ Figure from South Korea's KOTRA (Korean Trade Association). Personal correspondence.

considered further food aid since complications arose in September 2002 regarding abducted Japanese residents. Japan, which has been accused of laxity in its oversight of trade with North Korea, is known to be an unwitting source of high technology for the North Korean military.⁵⁰ It is also suspected that North Korea, in conjunction with the Japanese criminal community, has earned large sums selling drugs and engaging in other illegal activities.⁵¹ Over the years (but less often today), Koreans in Japan have paid exorbitant “donations” to North Korean officials to arrange meetings with their relatives stuck in North Korea.⁵²

Under pressure from the United States, the Japanese government is beginning to take more active measures to block illegal commercial transactions with North Korea, and there is even talk of future participation in a multilateral economic boycott. As a first step, in May 2003 the government announced that it was reinterpreting its Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law to permit the banning of remittances to North Korea, if the situation warrants. The law permits a trade ban “within the range necessary for the healthy development of Japan’s foreign trade and economy.” According to the new interpretation, if the United States requests Japan to impose such a ban, and Japan refuses, then Japan’s foreign trade and economy may be jeopardized—not by North Korea but by the United States. Therefore, to prevent such an occurrence, a ban could be imposed on North Korea.⁵³ For its part, the North Korean government has warned that economic sanctions from Japan will elicit a strong counteraction.⁵⁴

As a second economic step, the Japanese government has begun to institute more strict inspections of the North Korean freighters that frequently visit Japanese ports (over a thousand visits a year). Since early 2003, thanks to more strict port inspections, several North Korean ships have been turned away from or detained in Japanese ports, including the large passenger and freight ferry, the Mangyongbong, which makes regular port calls to conduct business with the North Korean community in Japan.

⁵⁰ In May 2003, a North Korean defector testified to the US Congress that 90 percent of the parts used in North Korea’s missile program were smuggled in from Japan. “90% of Missile Parts from Japan,” *The Japan Times*, internet version, May 22, 2003.

⁵¹ For example, NHK (Japanese public television) program “Close-up Gendai,” on July 10, 2003.

⁵² Han Kwang-hui (a former senior official of Ch’ongnyon, the North Korean residents association in Japan), *The Crime and Punishment of My Ch’ongnyon*, 2002.

⁵³ *The Daily Yomiuri*, internet version, May 19, 2003.

⁵⁴ KCNA, May 19, 2003: “If the Japanese reactionaries persistently engage themselves in such an anti-DPRK campaign, supporting the US pressure on the DPRK over the nuclear issue, Japan’s security will not be guaranteed and it may entail catastrophic consequences.”

The government officials who favor a more hawkish stand against North Korea, both in military and economic terms, are younger members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, including the JDA minister, Shigeru Ishiba, and the deputy cabinet minister, Shinzo Abe.⁵⁵ The Japanese public, which is adopting an increasingly negative attitude toward North Korea, seems to be getting behind the idea of imposing sanctions.⁵⁶

What is the Japanese view of Washington's North Korea policy? Despite US reluctance to agree to high-level bilateral meetings with North Korea, the Japanese have continued to make attempts to establish dialogue with North Korea, but so many issues separate the two countries that it is hard to be optimistic about a near-term positive outcome. The Japanese were excluded from the US-North Korea-China talks held in Beijing in April 2003. If the United States imposes economic sanctions on North Korea, the Japanese may join in—especially if the sanctions are supported by the UN Security Council or if North Korea crosses a “red line”—for example, firing another ICBM over Japan or testing a nuclear device.⁵⁷ Given Japan's peace constitution, the strong pacifist mood of the Japanese people, and the vulnerability of Japan to North Korean attack, it is unlikely that Japan would support a US preemptive attack on North Korea or agree beforehand to allow US bases in Japan to be used in such an attack.

South Korea

South Koreans show relatively little fear of North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles, which is surprising considering the proximity of North Korea, the frequency and magnitude of its threats against South Korea, and the experience of the Korean War. There is a noticeable divide in public opinion between the older generations—who recall the Korean War as a case of naked North Korean aggression, and the younger generations—who believe that the Korean War was caused by the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union. The presidential administration of Roh Moo-hyun, which was inaugurated in February 2003, is the first to be dominated by the younger generation. A serious disagreement exists in the administration between Roh's close associates, who were brought in with him from outside the political circle, and political figures who have long served in the government. An important adviser on North Korean affairs, Yi Chong-sok, is relatively hostile toward the United States and favors Korea moving closer to China and North Korea. Responding to the charge that

⁵⁵ Yoshihisa Komori. Also, *Asahi Shimbun*, internet version, May 21, 2003, Morning edition.

⁵⁶ A *Sankei Shimbun* poll published on the internet on March 24, 2003, found 50 percent of the public agreeing that “economic sanctions should be imposed on North Korea.” *Sankei Shimbun*, a strongly conservative paper, did not report how the poll was conducted.

⁵⁷ Kyodo, March 13, 2003.

South Korea is becoming alienated from the US-Japan campaign to pressure North Korea to relinquish its nuclear program, Yi replied: "Such an expression would be appropriate if we desired to join in the effort and were refused, but we do not wish to do so." The head of the unification ministry, Chong Se-hyon, also favors engagement with North Korea. Figures in the ministry of foreign affairs and trade and the ministry of national defense favor holding on to the security alliance with the United States, even if it means alienating North Korea.⁵⁸

At least four motives underlie the attitudes that many Koreans have toward foreign policy in general and policy toward North Korea in particular: nationalism, anti-Americanism, the desire for eventual unification, and pursuit of individual wealth and national economic strength. The first three motives reduce the perception of a threat from North Korea. In the short run, the fourth motive provides a reason to delay unification with the impoverished North, but most Koreans believe that in the long run, unification will be necessary to make Korea competitive in the international marketplace.

South Koreans have been the targets of many North Korean threats. Today, North Korea's nuclear weapons, delivered by missiles, planes, or surface transport, are the most apocalyptic threat. Yet, many South Koreans believe that the North Koreans would not unleash weapons of mass destruction against their fellow Koreans, but would instead target Japan or, if possible, the United States. A more common North Korean threat takes the form of commando raids intended to undermine South Korea's democratic society in preparation for a North Korean takeover, but in this regard the attacks have been notably unsuccessful. Paradoxically, the most plausible threat to South Korea is the collapse of North Korea, resulting in a flood of millions of refugees, and a reconstruction bill estimated at between \$50 billion and \$4 trillion over a ten year period. Rather than face the prospect of either collapse or a North Korean attack made in response to international pressure, many South Koreans appear to prefer living with the status quo and guaranteeing the security of the current North Korean regime,⁵⁹ even with a nuclearized North Korea.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Yi Kyo-kwan, "Inside Story on the Power Game Played by Foreign Affairs and Security Team," *Chugan Chosun*, July 3, 2003, pp. 24-26.

⁵⁹ The expressed opinion of Na Chong-il, Roh's national security adviser. See Yi Kyo-kwan, "The ROK Must Guarantee the North Korean System," *Chugan Chosun*, June 5, 2003, pp. 42-44.

⁶⁰ A member of an advance South Korean foreign policy team for the Roh administration told a small group of American Korea specialists that if their president were forced to choose, he would rather live with North Korean nuclear weapons than see another Korean conflict. When this statement was leaked to the press, the official said (inaccurately) that he was expressing the sentiment of Korea's younger generation,

President Roh, who had no experience in national politics before becoming president, was overwhelmed by the demands of the job. In his first months in office, he frequently contradicted himself and failed to bring the divergent political positions of his administration together. The official—and probably contradictory—policy of his administration is to not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea, but by all means to resolve the situation peacefully. If the situation cannot be resolved peacefully, the administration is at a loss for ideas. Believing that the Bush administration is not averse to solving foreign policy problems with force, President Roh has come out strongly against the use of force on the Korean peninsula, saying: “A military strike on North Korea is an extremely serious matter that could lead to a war on the peninsula. So I oppose even a review of such a possibility.”⁶¹ President Roh believes that the United States and the international community should offer the North Korean regime security guarantees and economic aid in return for North Korea’s promise not to develop nuclear weapons.⁶²

Roh’s foreign affairs minister has failed to take a strong lead in foreign affairs, preferring to paper over disagreements. Although anyone who has paid even casual attention to US-Japan-ROK dialogue on North Korea is aware that the three countries have different policy preferences, Minister Yun insists that there are “absolutely no differences of opinion” among the three countries.⁶³ Roh’s national security adviser, Na Chong-il, has likewise said that there are no differences of opinion between presidents Roh and Bush on North Korean affairs.⁶⁴

South Korean public opinion is as divided as government opinion. The younger generations tend to be more in favor of engaging North Korea and moving away from the United States. In a nation-wide poll conducted by Seoul National University in January 2003, 41 percent said they dislike the United States—almost double the rate of two years ago—and only 25 percent said they like the United States.⁶⁵ Among those in their twenties, 64 percent said they dislike the United States. Among those who had two or more years of college education, the figure was 50 percent. Yet South Koreans are not willing to overlook North Korea’s nuclear ambitions. Asked if South Korea should

and not the sentiment of President-elect Roh. Personal interview and “Amateur Diplomats,” editorial in *Chosun Ilbo*, internet version, February 11, 2003.

⁶¹ “Roh on the Record: Setting His Agenda,” *The Korea Herald*, internet version, February 25, 2003.

⁶² Interview with President Roh by Kim Kyo-man and Han Chong-ho on April 14, 2003, *Munhwa Ilbo*, internet version, April 15, 2003.

⁶³ Interview with Minister Yun on KBS television, July 13, 2003.

⁶⁴ Yi Kyo-kwan.

⁶⁵ Kim Chi-ho, “Koreans Like N.K.; U.S. Less,” *The Korea Herald*, internet version, April 11, 2003.

extend economic aid to North Korea even if the North develops nuclear weapons, 19 percent agreed and 61 percent disagreed. Among those in their twenties, 24 percent agreed, compared to only 12 percent in their 50s.⁶⁶

Koreans of all ages are worried about being caught up in another Korean War. In a poll published by South Korea's left-leaning daily *Hangyore* (no polling background given), 78 percent of respondents believed that a US attack on North Korea would drag South Korea into another war.⁶⁷ Few Koreans of any age favor the idea of bombing North Korea to rid it of nuclear weapons. The support rate was in the range of 10 to 17 percent, except for those age 60 or older, 28 percent of whom favor bombing. The majority (51 percent) of respondents favor a compromise in which the United States recognizes the Kim Jong-il regime and North Korea eliminates its nuclear weapons.

Reflecting popular sentiment, the South Korean government has repeatedly urged the United States to engage North Korea in dialogue. In the meantime, South Korean dialogue, aid, and commercial transactions with North Korea have increased. Any international economic blockade of North Korea, whether sponsored by the United States or the UN Security Council, would be unpopular in South Korea, although the ROK government might cooperate to the extent of reducing its aid donations to the North. For most South Koreans, a US attack on North Korea is unthinkable, and it is highly unlikely that the South Korean government during Roh's nonrenewable five-year tenure will permit the United States to launch an attack from US bases in the South. If such an attack were launched, even from offshore, it would seriously jeopardize, if not terminate, the US-ROK security alliance.

US OPTIONS REVISITED

The nuclear situation on the Korean peninsula continues to evolve. Important milestones include: (1) the October 1994 signing of the Agreed Framework, which froze North Korea's nuclear installations at Yongbyon; (2) President Bush's inclusion of North Korea in the "axis of evil" in January 2002; (3) Assistant Secretary Kelly's October 2002 meeting, at which North Korea admitted it was building a forbidden uranium enrichment program; (4) North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003; and (5) the US-China-DPRK talks of April 2003, at which North Korea told the US it had nuclear weapons. The next milestone will be the six party (US-China-DPRK-ROK-Japan-Russia)

⁶⁶ Kim Cho-ho.

⁶⁷ Kim To-hyong, "Only 10 percent in Their 50s Say 'Support Strike on DPRK Nuclear Facilities,'" *Hangyore*, internet version, May 15, 2003.

talks, scheduled to convene for two days in late August 2003. A possible milestone in the indeterminate future would be a North Korean nuclear weapons test.

Table 1 broadly summarizes the perceptions of regional states on risk, potential damage, and perceived threat from North Korea, and then estimates their attitudes toward alternative US policies toward North Korea. For the most part, the patterns are predictable. Greater perceived risk and potential damage from North Korea are associated with greater perceived threat. The exception is the South Korean case, where risk and potential damage are high, but perceived threat is low. Either the South Koreans know their North Korean compatriots well enough to be confident North Korea would not attack South Korea, or the South Koreans are fooling themselves. South Korea's Roh administration is strongly in favor of engaging North Korea, even at the risk of alienating the United States. The South Korean people are divided on this issue, but more South Koreans, especially the younger ones, like North Korea than like the United States.

**Table 1. Regional Threat Perceptions and Positions
on Washington's North Korea Policy Options**

PERCEPTIONS:

	China	Russia	Japan	South Korea
Risk	Low	Very low	High	High
Damage	Low	Very low	High	High
Fear	Low	Very low	High	Low

SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE US POLICIES:

	China	Russia	Japan	South Korea
US Negotiation	Favor	Favor	Favor?	Favor
US Containment	Accept	Accept	Favor	Accept
US Economic Sanctions	Oppose	Oppose	Accept?	Oppose
US Preemptive Attack	Strongly oppose	Oppose	Oppose	Strongly oppose

KEY:

Risk: Perceived likelihood of being attacked by North Korea (if provoked)

Damage: Physical, social, and political cost of being attacked by North Korea

Fear: Expressed fear of North Korean attack (threat perception)

Threat perceptions translate in predictable ways into attitudes toward US North Korea policies. Those countries that feel least threatened favor US compromise with North Korea or a continuation of the status quo. Japan, the country that feels most threatened, is less satisfied with compromise or the status quo, and more favorable toward stronger action against North Korea. But not even Japan would support preemptive military action, at least under the present circumstances.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the nuclear situation on the Korean peninsula is the issue of negotiation, which inevitably means compromise. Virtually no North Korea specialists in the United States believe that the Kim Jong-il government would ever permit the kind of intrusive international inspections that could absolutely verify whether or not North Korea has nuclear weapons or a weapons program. It is difficult to believe that specialists in other countries think otherwise. Therefore, those states that favor negotiation are essentially saying that they are willing to live with the possibility of a residual North Korean nuclear weapons capability, even though the government of every one of these governments has insisted that North Korean nuclear weapons can never be tolerated. Either these countries are willing to turn a blind eye to such a program, or they are willing to live with North Korean nuclear weapons for years to come, in the hope that the weapons will some day be abandoned.

The United States lacks attractive policy options. Containment or compromise means living with the suspicion that North Korea has nuclear weapons. Economic sanctions, even with the unlikely support of North Korea's neighbors, have little prospect of forcing the Kim Jong-il government to surrender its nuclear weapons and stop its nuclear programs, although sanctions will make life more difficult for Kim Jong-il by reducing his personal resources and those of his people. An attack on North Korea, or a limited military action to remove Kim Jong-il, would not receive any support from North Korea's neighbors.

A North Korean nuclear test-might well convince some or all of North Korea's neighbors to put economic or even military pressure on the Kim government. But even if these neighboring states joined the United States in a united front, it is difficult to see how they could change the fifty-year-old nature of the Kim regime enough to open North Korean society and eliminate the government's need for a strong military deterrent, short of an overthrow of the Kim Jong-il government. At least until the situation in Iraq is stabilized, the United States is unlikely to take on another case of regime change and nation building.

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14. ABSTRACT U.S. options to deal with North Korea's emerging nuclear weapons program include renewed engagement and a new negotiated agreement (as called for by North Korea), economic sanctions, military action, or Cold War-style hostile containment. The United States is trying to form a multilateral coalition to stop the North Korean nuclear program, but the regional states hold differing views on the best options to pursue. China and Russia, at relatively low risk from North Korean nuclear weapons, are promoting a compromise whereby the United States will guarantee the security of the North Korean regime in return for an end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Japan, which is directly threatened by North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles, prefers a tougher line, possibly including economic sanctions. South Korea is objectively at great risk from North Korea, but because most South Koreans believe that the risk is very low, they favor a policy of dialogue and compromise. The positions of all these states may harden if North Korea stages a nuclear weapons test, but until that happens, the United States can expect little support for either economic sanctions or military action in dealing with North Korea					
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